

369 50 • THE FAMILY: DOWRY AND INHERITANCE

571 the village attracts, and the villagers comment on their satisfaction at seeing some
796 different faces.

369 A caveat may be in order here, however. No matter how much the vil-
461 lagers like the variety of life in the towns, and no matter how much they dislike
the tiring and messy work on the farms, when they actually live in the village
and are engaged in the work in the fields and at home, they work hard, steadily,
and with a will. The people of Vasilika do not believe work is ennobling in
itself; they seem to have no compulsive need to work to achieve self-respect, but
they accept the need for hard labor as a means to the end of support for the
family. Therefore, the villagers expect the farmer and his household to work
[594] hard and for long hours if an agricultural existence is their immediate fate, but
[554] do not condemn some farmer if he tries to arrange a different fate for his chil-
dren. If he is unsuccessful, and all his sons stay on the farm, or if his daughters
are married off to farmers, there is no disgrace in that either, as long as he did
the best he could. And if a farmer can bequeath a good farm to any of his sons
and the son manages the property skillfully, the economic success of the farm
brings a measure of prestige, in Vasilika, to father and son alike.

163 Within the context of these values let us consider how the dowry and in-
842 heritance system functions in Vasilika. Sometimes after a farmer marries and has
511 had at least one child, it would appear that he and his wife consider the ques-
178 tion of how many more children it would be sensible for them to have. The
parents recognize that the more children they have, the harder it will be to pro-
vide adequately for the future of each of them. Therefore, regulation of the
size of families is accepted in the village as obviously prudent and sensible. The
villagers explain that more children survive nowadays as a result of modern
medical care, and that this obviates the need to have a large family in the hope
that at least two or three of the children will reach maturity. In Vasilika, some
[844] prenatal care and confinement in one of the proprietary hospitals in Levadhia is
[554] recognized now as the safest kind of maternity care and also has the most pres-
[743] tige (Friedl 1958). Such care immediately increases the cost of childbirth and
[759] is a drain on the family's resources. But even those families whose babies are
[855] born at home with the aid of a traveling government-trained midwife are ex-
pected, as we have seen, to provide better food and finer clothing for their chil-
dren than earlier generations provided for theirs. The added expense of rearing
children has not been counterbalanced by any increase in their economic value
on the farms. On the contrary, less labor is regularly needed, as Chapter 2 has
shown.

The trend to smaller families seems to have started back in the 1920's. Genealogies show that the parents of the marriageable young adults of the middle and late 1950's had already limited the size of their families to a mode of four children in contrast to their parents who typically had had eight. The overt statements made by married men and women of all ages including the sixty- and seventy-year-old widows indicate that the change is deliberate and coincides with their expressed attitudes. Parents who have more children than they can adequately feed and care for are accused of behaving like animals; they

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are said to have neither brains nor self-control. Parents with marriageable children were, therefore, in 1961, contemplating the division of their estates into fewer portions than their parents had done before them.

As his children are growing up, a farmer calculates approximately what he must give his daughter or daughters for dowries and how much will be left for each of his sons to share. If it is fairly obvious that the share left for the sons will be insufficient to support each of them, the farmer tries to make some other provision for one or more of the boys. Any boy who shows promise as a student is encouraged to continue his schooling beyond the compulsory sixth-grade elementary school in the village. Education is so highly prized that sometimes even an only son who might inherit an adequate farm is allowed to continue his education if he shows ability in academic subjects. The next step after elementary school most commonly chosen by the villagers is the six-year classical or humanistic gymnasium which serves as a necessary base for any civil service or white-collar post, and also for further study in the university or in specialized advanced technical schools. Although there are some private gymnasia, most of the farmers of Vasilika have sent their sons to the virtually free public institutions (Antonakaki 1955:39). These are in the provincial towns or in Athens, so that although there is little tuition charge, the farmer must pay for his son's board and room, for his school supplies, and for adequate clothing. Whenever possible, children are boarded with an aunt or uncle who lives in the town, but even under these conditions, farmers pay a fee to the relatives to cover the cost of their children's care. Sometimes, to keep food costs down, a mother prepares a basket of bread, cheese, and perhaps a vegetable stew for her son, places it in the bus bound for the town in which the boy goes to school, and the boy picks up the basket at the bus depot.

Whatever the particular arrangement, schooling involves an expenditure of current income, and the farmers consider that the cost of educating a son is about equivalent to a major portion of his share of the inheritance. The Greek Civil Code makes a specific provision for this view by declaring that educational expenses beyond those normally to be expected from the economic position of the family may be counted as part of the inheritance (Section 1895). In Vasilika it is assumed that a gymnasium-educated young man will spend the rest of his life living in some town, and that he will receive only a token share of the land after his father's death or at the time of the division of the estate. His parents, brothers, and sisters remaining in the villages as farmers gain in social stature and in potential actual advantage from his residence in town in a prestige-giving occupation. Both the legal code and village custom, then, involve the recognition that when farmers or shepherds undertake to educate their sons beyond the village school, they are striving for an improved status position in the nation as a whole, and that if sons succeed in the new prestige-giving occupation, they are the agents of upward social mobility for the family. Among Vasilika's land-owning farmers, an educated son gives the village the added advantage of a larger amount of land to divide among the remaining children. For farmers and shepherds who have very small land holdings or none at all, the

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423 combined into one holding. The great majority of the families
425 of the village, however, still occupied 27 or 32 stremmata in
1956, and most of the original holders of the allotments were
still alive.

x 178 The land settlement in Nea Eleftherohori differed from that
621 in Lofiscos in two respects. First, the farms in Nea Eleftherohori
241 were less than one fifth as large as in Lofiscos. Second, the new
433 settlers, uprooted from their former homes, whether up the
mountain or in distant Asia Minor, left binding customary ways
of life behind them, and started off in Nea Eleftherohori with-
out the automatic conservatism and suspicion of innovation
typical until very recently of the families of Lofiscos. These
differences acted together to make the farmers of Nea Elef-
therohori a good deal more willing to try new crops and meth-
ods, even before the war, than those in the older Thessalian
community. Life on so little land was difficult at best, and any-
thing that promised to bring in a little more seemed worth try-
ing; and when the problems of farming the land were new in
any event, there was far less psychological resistance against
trying some further innovation.

621 Another contrast with Lofiscos, a contrast perhaps related
● 163 to the general shake-up of old customary routines which came
433 to the inhabitants of Nea Eleftherohori between 1912 and 1923,
is that the new settlers proceeded to procreate children at a
far greater rate than occurs in Lofiscos, where families are
mostly quite small.²

2. It would be very interesting to know why the prosperous peasants of
Lofiscos have fewer children than their much poorer fellows in Nea Elef-
therohori, but I do not know Lofiscos well enough to hazard an opinion.
Can it be that the general market orientation of their agriculture and the
habit of calculating in monetary terms leads them to restrict the number
of their children deliberately, in some fashion or other, realizing that to
divide the family farm among many children spells impoverishment for

6: McNeill H-5 (1947, 1956) 1957

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The smallness of the original farms and the large size of most families in Nea Eleftherohori began, even in the late 1930's, to present the villagers with a very serious problem. What were their children going to do? To divide the land was a desperate solution, inasmuch as the farms were already near the minimum that a single family could subsist upon. Somehow or other, all but one son had to be freed from the land, find some other form of livelihood, and leave the entire farm to be inherited by one brother. Hopeless poverty if not outright hunger was the certain lot of everyone who stayed on a divided inheritance.³

Nea Eleftherohori has been less fortunate than Lofiscos in still another respect. Situated at the foot of Mount Olympus, it lay just on the edge of the territory that guerrilla bands controlled in 1943-45 and again in 1947-49. These were, therefore, years of intense political insecurity in the village, and some loss of life. In 1947 the guerrillas organized a raid upon Nea Elef-

the new generation? If so, why not in Nea Eleftherohori? To be sure, that village pursued a more nearly subsistence style of agriculture between the wars; but this fact by itself does not seem enough to explain the contrast. Perhaps the prevalence of early marriages in Nea Eleftherohori, consequent upon the mode of land distribution in 1927, accounts for the difference, early marriages naturally bringing larger families; or perhaps some recklessness engendered by the catastrophic upheaval which the Asia Minor refugee population underwent encouraged large families, for there is in Nea Eleftherohori, as in all of Greece, a noticeable differential in birth rate between refugee and "old settler" groups, with the refugees standing higher.

3. In legal form, the Greek government retained title to all the land distributed to refugees and squatters after World War I. Part of the original justification for this policy was that it would permit the government to prevent excessive subdivision of peasant farms; and it was still the case in 1956 that legal tenure of each allotment was lodged in a single family head. This, however, did not prevent some families from dividing the allotments in practice among the heirs. Yet the fact that such divisions could not be legalized may perhaps have reinforced the reluctance of the families of Nea Eleftherohori to make them.

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* 178 riages. Until the means for living respectably can be assured,
 511 the families of Nea Eleftherohori are no longer willing to allow
 582 their children to marry, nor do the children themselves wish it.
 In 1956, a young man who would inherit a farm of 27 strem-
 [583] mata expected his bride to bring with her a dowry of about 300
 gold pounds. This is a truly extraordinary figure for any family
 in the village to raise, equal to \$3,000 in American currency
 and considerably more in local purchasing power. Ten or fif-
 teen years of strenuous saving are required to accumulate so
 much, all the more since appearances have to be maintained in
 [589] the meantime, and this takes money too. Consequently, a good
 many men and women in their thirties and some in their early
 forties remain unmarried.

* 178 Once again, a partial exception must be made for the refu-
 582 gees, among whom the dowry system is not so universal and
 binding as among the old settlers, and who still sometimes
 583 marry young and before the new family has any assured means
 [563] of support. But the dowry system is said to be spreading among
 [626] them too; and the disdain (mingled perhaps with a certain
 envy) with which the old settlers speak of the refugees' irre-
 sponsible marriages makes it clear that the strongest sort of so-
 cial pressure is at work to prevent such occurrences.

[168] Apparently the people of Nea Eleftherohori are making use
 of an old custom, the dowry, to regulate population growth.
 Quite consciously and deliberately, they seek to keep their
 numbers within the limits imposed by their economic position;
 or, to put it the other way around, the villagers are determined
 not to sink into poverty, or to allow their children to do so; and
 by postponing marriages they know they can avoid the disaster
 of having too many mouths to feed.

• 163 The birth records of the village show what has been accom-
 168 plished in this direction. Before 1939 the number of births
 621 annually recorded never sank below 42, and went as high as 77

6: McNeill H-5 (1947, 1956) 1957

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in 1933. Since the war the number of recorded births has never exceeded 19, and sank as low as 11 in 1953. Deaths have declined also, but not as sharply, so that the natural increase of the village population in the early 1950's ranged from 6 to 12 persons a year instead of the 30 to 40 a year of the early 1930's. This decrease is the more striking since the total population of the village grew from something like 450 at the time the basic distribution of land was made in 1927 to 875 in 1956. [162]

Two defects are obvious in the adjustment which the people of Nea Eleftherohori are making to their straitened circumstances. In the first place, there is no certainty that the boys pursuing a secondary school education will be able to find jobs when their training is completed. In 1956, there were three or four graduates of the gymnasium living in the village, waiting for something to turn up. One of them was working as a laborer on a road gang — a fate considered a terrible indignity to an educated man, even by his peasant relatives. But I was told that so far, "sooner or later," everyone who had finished the gymnasium course had been able to get a job in town, usually in the government civil service; and the parents who were sending their boys to school seemed to have no serious doubts that in due course their sons, too, might find a government desk to sit behind. If their hopes should be betrayed, then of course the whole campaign for maintaining family standards of living will be in danger of breaking down. Bitter disillusionment and discontent may then gain ground, especially among the educated young men. This is a real danger, for even a civil service as capacious as that of Greece cannot absorb indefinitely the gymnasium graduates of many villages like Nea Eleftherohori; and, of course, the gymnasium training does not prepare the boys for anything but white-collar work. [647]

The second defect is psychological. Long postponement of marriage through the dowry represents a drastic alteration [178^x]
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621 face life on a smaller piece of land; but this problem does not
 x 178 seem especially acute to the larger farmers. An interesting in-
 [428] dicator of this fact is that in 1956 only thirty boys from the vil-
 [873] lage attended the gymnasium in New Corinth close by — a
 smaller number than Nea Eleftherohori was sending to a con-
 siderably more distant school, though the population of Old
 Corinth is nearly three times as great as that of the Macedonian
 village. As a matter of fact, the recent increases in the yield
 [433] from Old Corinth's land have been so great that a new family
 [571] can face life with equanimity, even owning only half as much
 land as their parents possessed.

621 For the landless segment of the population, and for those
 x 178 who own only a tiny plot insufficient to maintain a family any-
 571 way, the problem is quite different. Here the major considera-
 433 tion is not land but wages; and as long as there is work, and
 wages are comparatively good, the new generation can start off
 with little or nothing but a strong back and willing hands, and
 [582] hope to make out about as well as their fathers have done. For
 them also, there is no overwhelming pressure to postpone mar-
 riage in order to keep up a standard of living.

621 As a result, the population statistics of Old Corinth do not
 • 163 show nearly so drastic a change from the prewar years as is
 165 evident in Nea Eleftherohori. Yet the birth rate has dropped in
 Old Corinth also. In the 1930's (when the population of the
 village was, of course, a good deal smaller) recorded births
 ranged between 58 and 46 each year. Since 1947 the range has
 been from 46 to 33. This change, however, has been nearly off-
 set by a parallel drop in the death rate. Before the war, deaths
 averaged close to 30 each year; since 1947 the average has been
 a little over 12. The drop has mainly been due to the elimina-
 [744] tion of malaria through DDT; whereas Old Corinth was for-
 merly one of the many places in Greece badly afflicted by that
 disease, there was no malaria in 1956.